ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts General laws, Chapter 30A, Section 20, notice is hereby given for the following meeting of the:

Arlington School Committee
Standing Subcomittee: Community Relations
Monday, November 16, 2015
5:00 PM

Community Relations Subcommittee Meeting

Arlington High School
Guidance Conference Room
869 Mass Avenue
Arlington, MA

Open Meeting

Approve draft minutes from November 2, 2015

Public Participation

Outreach to the Community: January Charrette

Survey Results: Second Reading

Community Meetings: Discussion and Planning

Adjournment

The listings of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.

Stated times and time amounts, listed in parenthesis, are the estimated amount of time for that particular agenda item. Actual times may be shorter or longer depending on the time needed to fully explore the topic.

Submitted by Jennifer Susse

Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Approve draft minutes from November 2, 2015

ATTACHMENTS:

	Type	Description
🗋	Minutes	Draft Minutes November 2, 2015

Community Relations Subcommittee Minutes
Monday, November 2nd

Present: SC: Cindy Starks, Jennifer Susse; APS: Dr. Kathleen Bodie, Dr. Laura Chesson, Julie Dunn; Other: Al Hiltz, Sarah Hugenberger

Absent: SC: Judson Pierce

Called to order 5:00 PM

No Public participation.

1. **Next Steps: Outreach to the Community on Enrollment**

Ms. Susse presented a compilation of enrollment options gathered from the APS, SC and members of the community. We decided that we would collect options under the purview of the Community Relations Subcommittee, but that a discussion of those options is best done at Facilities or by the newly formed Task Force.

We discussed holding another community-wide meeting on our enrollment challenges, which may or may not appropriately be called a Charrette. We tentatively discussed the format of a public meeting, and agreed that it should be different from the SC meeting that was held in Town Hall in September.

Dr. Bodie thought we should wait until after we heard from the MSB about the High School, which both she and Dr. Chesson thought would be shortly after they meet on December 16th. We agreed that early January would be a good time. Besides avoiding the holidays, holding the meeting in early January allows the Task Force to meet a couple of times, is before the Special Town Meeting on January 25th, and is still before any major decisions will have been made. Dr. Bodie pointed out that decisions about temporary modulars will need to be made in January. Ms. Susse reiterated that it is very important that the community is involved in the larger decisions. Ms. Starks said that she wishes she had a better understanding of our constraints and how Dr. McKibben's numbers compare to our October 1st 2015 numbers.

2. **Dashboard/Website Design**

Ms. Susse presented a list of websites she had found that have a better design than ours. Dr. Bodie argued that APS actually has more information on their site, though it is not organized well. Ms. Dunn pointed out that the sites that look especially professional are all *content managed sites*, which they have decided against using because they are very expensive (about 35K to design + 5K yearly to host), the process takes a long time, and there was concern with having the site hosted on an outside server. Ms. Dunn and Dr. Bodie said they would have a

version of the in-house designed web site for us to look at and comment on sometime in December.

Ms. Starks argued that APS should take over the school websites, which are designed, run, and managed by volunteers at each school. Dr. Bodie claimed that we do not currently have the staff capacity to take over the management and design of those websites, and that we would have to add staff to take this task on. We talked about potentially adding such a request during the budget process.

3. First Read: Parent/Survey Results

Ms. Susse presented a two page summary of the results of last year's 68-question survey. Ms. Starks argued that we should not separate out "positive" and "negative" results. She worries about presenting negative results for things which we have no ability to change. Ms. Susse argued that we should be honest about our problems, even if those problems are not unique to Arlington. The committee agreed that Ms. Susse would take another stab at the survey and present it at our next meeting.

Next meeting scheduled for Monday, November 16th at 5:00.

Meeting adjourned at 6:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Susse
Chair, Community Relations Subcommittee

Attachments:
- Ottoson School Proposal
- Options for Enrollment Growth
- Dashboard and Webpage Examples
- Parent Survey Results

Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Outreach to the Community: January Charrette

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	Description
Backup Material	Charrette

Public Meeting on Enrollment Challenges
Charrette

Purpose of a large public meeting is to educate the community about our constraints and opportunities, and for the community to express their values and contribute their thoughts.

Timing/Details:
- Ideally this would happen the first week in January, after we know about the H.S. but before the Special Town Meeting on January 25th. (According to Patsy Kramer Town Hall is currently available the first week of January.)
- Ideally this is something that should be sponsored, or co-sponsored, by the Task Force.
- Both Joe Curro and Stacie Smith, a 15-year veteran of Consensus Building Institute, are willing to help craft the structure of the meeting.
- Someone has to pay for custodian.

Tentative Structure:
- Intro: Present Constraints and Opportunities (10 Minutes)
- Visioning Exercise at Small Tables: What do we care about, what do we want to preserve? (15 Minutes). Top three values are put on Large Stickies to be brought to the front of the room.
- Solicit *Likes*, *Concerns*, and *Questions* on Major Issues (20 Minutes)
  Major issues are moderated by Task Force members and discussed at fixed spots in the room. Participants, organized by tables, rotate among these issues. (e.g., Clustering Grades, Neighborhood Elementary Schools, etc.). Write notes on flip charts.
- At the end each facilitator presents three things that "rose to the top"
- End with discussion of process and next steps

Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

Survey Results: Second Reading

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	Description
Second Reading	Survey Results

Last year's 68 question survey produced a dizzying array of data and open response comments to sort through. We received 1366 responses, representing about 35% of the families in our district. We learned a lot from the survey, both about our district and about the individual schools within our district. Here are some of the district-level highlights.

There were many areas in which parents thought we were doing well. Parents are proud of their children's schools. 76% reported that their school is an "excellent school" that provides a high quality education, 79% report that their child is proud of his/her school. An equal number would recommend their child's school to a friend. Other areas in which we have reason to feel pride include:

Great Teachers and Staff – 87% of parents report that the teachers at their children's school are "enthusiastic about teaching", 85% report that school staff is "courteous and helpful", and 82% of parents report that the school staff is committed to their child's education and responsive to their concerns.

Engaged Parents - Our survey parents are engaged. 94% attend most conferences and open houses and believe that their involvement helps their children. 82% report that there is an active parent association at their child's school, and 83% of OMS and AHS parents regularly check their child's progress online.

Happy Self-reliant Students – 90% of parents say that their child's school encourages students to "be responsible." Students report knowing who to talk to or get help from when needed. Furthermore, over 85% of elementary-school parents, 67% of middle-school parents, and 74% of high-school parents say that their child "enjoys going to school."

Communication – 89% of parents say that they are "kept up-to-date on school activates and events," 78% say that "school information is communicated effectively", and 85% say that they "know how to get school information when they need it." Elementary school parents report getting most of their information from their school's newsletter and their child. Parents at the High School report getting most of their information from the Principal's e-mails. Few parents were interested in receiving information via twitter or Facebook.

We also observed some areas of challenge. Unsurprising parents with students at the High School, Ottoson, and Stratton reported high levels of dissatisfaction with the facilities at their schools. Many of the areas of dissatisfaction were on issues that are not unique to Arlington. It is not unique to Arlington for parents to feel that their children have too much homework, to worry about bullying, and to be concerned about the level of anxiety that Middle and High School students are experiencing. Nevertheless, just because Arlington is not unique in these challenges does not mean that we should not take these concerns seriously. Here are some areas of concern.

Homework - While 57% of parents felt that the amount of homework given to their children is "appropriate," 24% felt that it was not. Dissatisfaction is highest at the middle-school level at 41%. However, the overwhelming majority of parents felt that the level of difficulty associated with their child's homework was appropriate.

Anxiety – Anxiety in elementary school is low (only about 20%) but jumps to over 40% for middle and H.S. students.

Challenges in the Curriculum - 26% of parents reported that their school could do more to challenge their child to "his/her full potential". Middle and High School parents were more likely to say that their child was challenged in math (56%) or ELA (64%) than were elementary school parents. 21% wish their children had more opportunity to "explore areas of interest outside core content areas."

Parent Engagement – Only 61% of parents report that they understand the academic expectations for their child. Interesting dissatisfaction was similar across all grade levels and schools, with most schools reporting 15-20% dissatisfaction. Only 51% of parents feel involved in the decisions that affect their child's education.

Discipline – 85% of parents report that their child's school is a safe environment to learn, but over 50% of parents reported that we could do a better job at dealing with student bullying, ensuring that our discipline policy is "fair and effective," and involving them in the discipline of their children.

Fantasy Question

We also had the opportunity to ask five custom questions. One of the questions was a "fantasy" question, which asked parents how we should spend a million-dollar windfall from Beacon Hill. At all levels the overwhelming first choice was to add more classroom teachers (27% of parents chose this as their first choice). For elementary-school parents, second and third choices were split between adding a foreign language in the elementary schools and making the school day longer. High school and middle school parents wanted more math coaches and increases in technology. Interestingly, among high school parents, eliminating sports and music fees came in fourth (at 11%).

Open Response Comments

Parents generally report high levels of satisfaction with teachers, staff and their community. They characterize their kids as "happy". The greatest areas of dissatisfaction are with the facilities (mostly at the H.S., OMS and Stratton), homework load and quality, and class sizes.

At the high school level parents liked the teachers and the community but wanted to "improve the utterly dispiriting facilities", have smaller classes, a later start time, and more supports for children who are lost. Parents wished that there was more technology available in the classrooms.

At the middle school level parents wanted better and less crowded facilities, more opportunity for students to move during the day and less punitive grading policies. They wished teachers were more accessible and approachable.

At the elementary school level parents are very concerned about class sizes. They want longer lunch and recess, more focus on project-based and experiential learning, and more challenges for advanced students. 5th grade parents wanted more challenging work in order to better prepare students for middle school.

Community Meetings: Discussion and Planning

ATTACHMENTS:

Type	Description
Reference Material	A Vision for Public Education in Arlington
Reference Material	webpage

A VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ARLINGTON

Want to understand what the overall vision of education should be in Arlington. Many facets to education, have different tables of discussions (think we should keep this to 5 or less):

- Student Load for teachers
    - How should we define?
    - What are acceptable class sizes?
        - What should we do when class sizes exceed this?
    - Ideal student:teacher ratio
- Funding (should this not be here – perhaps this is another forum)?
    - How it works now
    - Why it is not enough
    - What should we do?
    - What other options do we have – other than raising taxes?
- Curriculum
    - What do you like/not like about what we have now?
    - What should be added/removed?
    - What should we make sure we always cover?
    - More Art, Music, PE?
- What does a school look like
    - What staff are there?
    - What should every school have/not have?
    - Where and when should technology fit in?
- How long should the school day be?
    - What do you think of the current hours (need these)?
    - What about extending the day?
        - How do we pay for this?
- Communication
    - Teacher
    - School
    - District
- Other things we want to better understand?

Basic Outline for the 2 hour meeting:
(10 minutes) Introduction
(45 minutes) Have people break out and discuss and come up with ideas
(5-10 minutes each – 50minutes or less) Groups report out
(10 minutes) Wrap Up and our next steps

Webpage for Consensus Building Institute: http://www.cbuilding.org/